

HAPPY 350TH BIRTHDAY TO  
SCHENECTADY, NY

(Mr. TONKO asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. TONKO. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to congratulate and celebrate the city of Schenectady on the occasion of its 350th birthday.

Originally inhabited by the Mohawk tribe and then the Dutch, Schenectady's rich history has often served as an inspiration and genesis for many of America's accomplishments.

In the late 1800s, Thomas Edison moved Edison Machine Works to Schenectady, where advances led to new products, including the manufactured light bulb. Later becoming the headquarters of General Electric, Schenectady also played host to the former home of ALCO, the American Locomotive Company. These two developments prompted the community to be dubbed "the city that lights and hauls the world" and the "electric city."

Today, Schenectady is an important part of New York's Tech Valley, a nationwide leading region committed to green technology. From steam turbines to advanced batteries, Schenectady continues to lead the country with a focus on ingenuity and innovation, proving we can "Make it in America."

I am pleased to applaud the city of Schenectady on the rich history and numerous achievements it has accrued as we celebrate the wonderful 350th birthday of this community. I look forward to many bright and booming days to come.

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE SPEAKER  
PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 8 of rule XX, the Chair will postpone further proceedings today on the motion to suspend the rules on which a recorded vote or the yeas and nays are ordered, or on which the vote incurs objection under clause 6 of rule XX.

Any record vote on the postponed question will be taken later.

ESTABLISHING SPECIAL ENVOY  
FOR RELIGIOUS FREEDOM IN  
THE NEAR EAST AND SOUTH  
CENTRAL ASIA

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 440) to provide for the establishment of the Special Envoy to Promote Religious Freedom of Religious Minorities in the Near East and South Central Asia, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 440

*Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

SECTION 1. FINDINGS.

Congress finds the following:

(1) Seven Baha'i leaders in Iran have been wrongfully imprisoned since 2008.

(2) In May 2010, suspected terrorists attacked two mosques in Pakistan belonging to the Ahmaddiya minority Muslim sect, killing at least 80 people. Ahmadis consider themselves Muslim, but Pakistani law does not recognize them as such.

(3) Said Musa, an Afghan Christian convert, was arrested in May 2010 on charges of apostasy, a crime which can carry the death sentence, and was released in February 2011 only after sustained international pressure.

(4) On October 31, 2010, gunmen laid siege on Our Lady of Salvation Church in Baghdad, Iraq killing at least 52 police and worshippers, including two priests, making it the worst massacre of Iraqi Christians since 2003.

(5) Iraq's ancient and once vibrant Christian population that numbered an estimated 1,500,000 out of a total population in Iraq of 30,000,000 in 2003 has been reduced by at least one half, due in significant part to Christians fleeing the violence.

(6) In November 2010, a Pakistani court sentenced Aasia Bibi, a Christian mother of five, to death under the country's blasphemy law for insulting the Prophet Muhammad.

(7) On New Year's Eve 2010, 23 people were killed when a suicide bomber attacked a Coptic Christian church in Alexandria, Egypt.

(8) On March 2, 2011, Pakistani Federal Minorities Minister Shahbaz Bhatti, the only Christian member of the Cabinet, who was outspoken in his opposition to Pakistan's blasphemy laws was assassinated by extremists.

(9) The Department of State's 2010 International Religious Freedom Report stated that many religious minority groups in Uzbekistan "faced heavy fines and/or short jail terms for violations of restrictive religion laws".

(10) The Special Envoy for Anti-Semitism, Hannah Rosenthal, has noted that Holocaust glorification "is especially virulent in the Middle East media".

(11) A number of countries in the Middle East have recently undergone popular revolutions which in some countries have left security vacuums making religious minorities especially vulnerable to violent attacks, such as—

(A) in March 2011, the Shahedin Church in Helwan province, Egypt, was torched, leading to protests which spurred sectarian clashes in the streets of Cairo;

(B) on March 20, 2011, a group of Salafists in Upper Egypt cut off a Christian man's ear and burned his home and car; and

(C) news reports from April 2011 indicate that Salafi organizations in Egypt have been implicated in the destruction of Sufi shrines across the country fueling violent conflict.

(12) Many of these ancient faith communities are being forced to flee the lands which they have inhabited for centuries.

(13) The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom has recommended that Iran, Iraq, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan be designated by the Department of State as Countries of Particular Concern in accordance with the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998.

(14) The situation on the ground in the region continues to develop rapidly and the United States Government needs an individual who can respond in kind and focus on the critical situation of religious minorities in these countries.

SEC. 2. SPECIAL ENVOY TO PROMOTE RELIGIOUS  
FREEDOM OF RELIGIOUS MINORI-  
TIES IN THE NEAR EAST AND SOUTH  
CENTRAL ASIA.

(a) APPOINTMENT.—The President shall appoint a Special Envoy to Promote Religious Freedom of Religious Minorities in the Near East and South Central Asia (in this Act referred to as the "Special Envoy") within the Department of State.

(b) QUALIFICATIONS.—The Special Envoy should be a person of recognized distinction in the field of human rights and religious freedom and with expertise in the Near East and South Central Asia regions. The Special Envoy shall have the rank of ambassador and shall hold the office at the pleasure of the President.

(c) PROHIBITION.—The person appointed as Special Envoy may not hold any other position of Federal employment for the period of time during which the person holds the position of Special Envoy.

SEC. 3. DUTIES.

(a) IN GENERAL.—The Special Envoy shall carry out the following duties:

(1) Promote the right of religious freedom of religious minorities in the countries of the Near East and the countries of South Central Asia, denounce the violation of such right, and recommend appropriate responses by the United States Government when such right is violated.

(2) Monitor and combat acts of religious intolerance and incitement targeted against religious minorities in the countries of the Near East and the countries of South Central Asia.

(3) Work to ensure that the unique needs of religious minority communities in the countries of the Near East and the countries of South Central Asia are addressed, including the economic and security needs of such communities to the extent that such needs are directly tied to religious-based discrimination and persecution.

(4) Work with foreign governments of the countries of the Near East and the countries of South Central Asia to address laws that are inherently discriminatory toward religious minority communities in such countries.

(5) Coordinate and assist in the preparation of that portion of the report required by sections 116(d) and 502B(b) of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961 (22 U.S.C. 2151n(d) and 2304(b)) relating to the nature and extent of religious freedom of religious minorities in the countries of the Near East and the countries of South Central Asia.

(6) Coordinate and assist in the preparation of that portion of the report required by section 102(b) of the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 (22 U.S.C. 6412(b)) relating to the nature and extent of religious freedom of religious minorities in the countries of the Near East and the countries of South Central Asia.

(b) COORDINATION.—In carrying out the duties under subsection (a), the Special Envoy shall, to the maximum extent practicable, coordinate with the Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration of the Department of State, the Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom, the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, and other relevant Federal agencies and officials.

SEC. 4. DIPLOMATIC REPRESENTATION.

Subject to the direction of the President and the Secretary of State, the Special Envoy is authorized to represent the United States in matters and cases relevant to religious freedom in the countries of the Near East and the countries of South Central Asia in—

(1) contacts with foreign governments, intergovernmental organizations, and specialized agencies of the United Nations, the